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WATER MANAGEMENT POLICY FOR THE SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER BASIN

The South Saskatchewan River Basin (SSRB) includes the Red Deer, Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan rivers. Alberta Environment's South Saskatchewan River Basin Planning Program provided information to assist the government in making policy decisions for the SSRB. In 1986, the Alberta Water Resources Commission (AWRC) completed a report outlining recommendations on water management, based on public hearings held throughout the SSRB. The following Water Management Policy is based on the planning program, public input and the recommendations of the AWRC.

The Water Management Policy will guide the management of the surface water resources throughout the SSRB. The Water Resources Act will be amended to facilitate full implementation of this Policy and the Irrigation Expansion Guidelines for the SSRB.

1. MULTI-PURPOSE USE

   Multiple use will continue to be the principle governing the use and management of the waters in the SSRB.

   Multi-purpose use is the underlying principle governing the use and management of all water in Alberta. This policy reconfirms the government's objective to manage the resource to meet the requirements for diverse needs. These include domestic, municipal, agricultural, industrial, fisheries, wildlife, recreation and aesthetic requirements.

2. PRIORITY OF USES, MINIMUM FLOWS AND PREFERRED INSTREAM FLOWS

   The ownership of all surface water and ground water is vested in the Province. "Minimum" flows will be established on an individual river reach basis and these flows will be maintained to protect basic water quality and instream needs. Individual rights to divert and use water are granted in the form of licences, in accordance with legislation. These rights and their priority, as established by the date of application, will be respected. "Preferred" instream flows will be established on an individual river reach basis to protect desirable instream needs. The Province will reserve water when a predetermined level of allocation to licenced users and to instream flow requirements has been reached. A system of preferential use will be used to determine further allocations of water.

As the water in our province belongs to the people of Alberta, the government is responsible for the wise allocation of this resource. Consideration must be given to individuals who withdraw water for their use and the need to retain water in the river for instream needs, including recreation, fisheries, wildlife and maintaining adequate water quality to sustain the ecology of our streams.

Two levels of instream flow requirements will be defined: "minimum" to protect basic water quality and instream flow needs; and "preferred" to protect desirable instream flow needs. Regulated streams will be managed to meet preferred instream flows most of the time. During low runoff periods, it is recognized that water shortages will occur and instream flows will occasionally drop below the preferred level. On regulated streams, projects will be managed such that the instream flows drop to minimum levels only for short periods of time under drought conditions.

3. IRRIGATION

Maximum water allocation for irrigation purposes in the Red Deer, Bow and Oldman basins will be established with consideration to requirements for all other uses.

Irrigation agriculture is the largest consumptive user of water in Alberta. There is a need to establish guidelines for limiting irrigation expansion in the SSRB, based on the water supplies available.

Irrigation expansion will take place throughout the SSRB, including areas served by Irrigation Districts. Ongoing work on instream flow needs will assist in refining the guidelines for limiting irrigation expansion within individual Irrigation Districts and in other areas. These guidelines for limiting irrigation expansion will be reviewed in the year 2000.

4. APPORTIONMENT COMMITMENTS

Alberta will continue to manage the waters of the Red Deer, Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan Rivers in concert, with due regard to the needs and potential of each sub-basin, to ensure that the province's interprovincial commitments under the Master Agreement on Apportionment are met and to best serve the needs of all water users in the basin.

Alberta is committed to comply with the interprovincial Master Agreement on Apportionment which, in general, requires Alberta to pass 50 percent of the flow of eastern flowing rivers to Saskatchewan. The SSRB is spread over a wide geographical area and subject to varying climatic conditions. Coordinated management of the Red Deer, Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan Rivers, with due regard to the needs and potential of each

sub-basin, provides the best option to meet both the needs of Albertans and the interprovincial commitments.

5. WATER CONSERVATION

The true value of water must be recognized to ensure that it is put to its most beneficial use and is not wasted. To achieve this goal, objectives and guidelines for conservation and efficiency will be developed.

The province is committee "to achieve the protection, improvement and wise use of our Environment, now and in the future". The wise use of our water resources must be based on a recognition of the value of the resource. Compliance with guidelines for conservation and efficiency will be required. Improvements in efficiency and conservation measures beyond those required by the guidelines will be encouraged.

6. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Public consultation has been an accepted policy in water management in Alberta. The government will continue to be committed to full public consultation throughout the implementation of this water management policy.

The management of water resources affects all Albertans. The government is committed to ensuring that Albertans have every opportunity to understand and provide advice on water management decisions.